

should underwrite a program of economic, social, political, and military aid to include Nicaragua's four neighbors — Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras — besides the proposed Free Nicaraguan Government in Exile. Those four should be encouraged to band together in some kind of union — a United Central American Organization, as the writer has previously suggested in these pages — which would take steps to revive the economies of each country and to restore intraregional trade while moving toward regional economic integration. They recognize, as does Washington, that none of Central America's tiny economies, lacking basic resources such as oil, can ever become viable acting on its own. They must be brought together in some sort of economic union, beginning with a common market — an experiment which was tried before and failed essentially because of the absence of U.S. leadership — if the people of the area are to prosper in peace and freedom.

To be credible, the U.S. commitment to a United Central America Organization, and through it a Free Nicaraguan Government in Exile, should extend well beyond the life of the present administration. I repeat a suggestion I made, in an earlier article for *The Washington Times*, that we sign a Treaty of Mutual Cooperation, Assistance, and Defense with the UCAO's four members to last for 20 years: the Nicaraguan exile government should also be a signatory to it. Two decades should give the Central Americans ample time

to heal their wounds and establish the basis for a healthy economic and political system.

In the same article, I proposed that the UCAO invite the Sandinistas to join in, provided they agreed to establish real freedom and democracy in Nicaragua and also welcomed the reintegration of the exiles into Nicaraguan society. But that seems no longer possible, since the Sandinistas have hardened their position to the point of no return. Still, the UCAO might make a gesture in that direction, in order to clear the air, but give Managua a short time-limit to respond.

Indeed, time is of the essence. To gain Senate approval, which is all the treaty would need to become effective, the administration would have to act at once: in November, the Republicans might lose their majority in that body. The failure of the Contadora peacemaking process could meanwhile spread disillusion throughout Central America.

Such a program should have particular appeal for Congress, as it begins to debate the administration's \$100 million aid package. Congressional liberals would have severe pangs of conscience about voting against the Central American equivalent of motherhood and apple pie. But the administration, to ensure liberal backing, would of course have to incorporate something like the UCAO-Free Nicaraguan Government proposal in its present package soonest.

Each day that passes without a resolution of the Central American conflict enhances the danger of war.

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